

GLEANINGS FROM MY JOURNAL.

A NIGHT IN MILAN.

BY BLUE JOHN.

"Well, here we are at Milan, sir! pray what hour may it be?" asked one of my fellow-travellers, touching me familiarly upon the back. "Just half-past eleven," I answered, moving towards a lamp to get sight of the dial of my watch. "A beautiful time-piece, that!" exclaimed the querist, peering over my shoulder; then as if a sudden idea had broken in upon him, "ah! and where do you put up to-night?" "I'm a stranger in Milan, and have fixed upon no particular hotel." "What say you to the A—— inn?" suggested in an off-hand way my neighbor, drawing me a few paces from the now fast-dispersing group of travellers. Casting a hasty look at his keen black eye, and hairy face, I hesitated, he turned to button up his coat, and while so doing, the handle of a dirk protruded from his breast, our eyes met, and half-ashamed

of my suspicions, I stammered out a bungling assent. His swarthy features lighted up with a grim smile, which quickly suppressing, he motioned to a ragged porter, and bade him in an under voice, to take our baggage, and lead the way. Moving slowly onward through the silent streets, we followed our guide for some time, as bending beneath his load, he staggered a few paces ahead, or speeding on by starts, was half-hidden in the distance and obscurity. Soon leaving, however, the more frequented streets, he turned abruptly off, threading his way through a perfect maze of alleys, silent, irregular, and narrow, and whose dreariness was made but more apparent by an occasional light, dimly smouldering before some saint's image in the wall. "Halt!" suddenly cried a commanding voice, and at the same time a dark form issuing from a recess of a wretched hovel, strode forward; my new acquaintance fell back a step. "I beg pardon, sir!" said the stranger, scrutinizing my person, "pray walk on."

"Uno sbirro;" whispered my companion in my ear, as he quickly moved ahead, "uno sbirro! come, come!" "This is the place," cried the porter, stopping at length before a small and suspicious looking hole, and plying with one hand the heavy iron knocker of the portal, he extended the other for his fee. I slipped a silver piece between his fingers; he gazed astonished at the magnitude of the gift, bowed, coughed, and stepping close up to my side: "Are you aware"—he began in a low, hesitating voice; a shadow fell between us; 'twas my companion. "Good night, sleep well—sleep—well," murmured the porter, and as he dwelt upon the last word, I thought I could distinguish by the flickering light of the lanthorn overhead, a strange expression of warning and pity on his squalid features. It might be imagination, it might be accident, and yet—I made a step towards the spot where he was standing, in order to exchange a word; he was gone, and I but caught a glimpse of the dim outline of his figure as he dashed around a corner of the alley.

"Will Mylord walk in?" demanded a slip-shod waiter, with whom respect and sleepiness seemed to strive for the mastery; "this way Mylord," and stumbling through several narrow winding passages, and up a creaking stairs, he led me to a small piazza, and ushered me in a close and sickly smelling chamber. "At what hour will his excellency be awakened?" "I leave for home to-morrow morning at three; is my baggage here? ah, yes, 'tis well." "Good nght, Mylord, may his Excellency repose well." "Harkee a moment, garzone, I'm neither Mylord nor Excellency, but a simple Signore, do you hear?" "Ah si, capisco! his Excellency wishes to remain incognito, capisco benissimo, good night, Mylord." D—n his titles, they'll cost me a double fee, and a swollen bill for lodgings! well, let's take a survey of Mylord Excellency's sepulchral resting place—a shabby cut-throat looking stye at best, and what a stench! confound the Italian who allured me here—not to slander him, his face is cut out in a scoundrel's

pattern! what a blockhead to be sure, to follow him—a perfect stranger!” The door of my room was suddenly thrown open, and the servant entering, surprised me bending down, candle in hand, examining the space beneath the bed. “Ah Mylord, I forgot, will his Excellency please inscribe his name?” and he laid upon the table a ragged dog-eared book, the blotted sheets of which were scrawled over with uncouth confused masses of ill-written plebeian names. “There!” cried I, putting down the ink-stained pen, you perceive I’m no Mylord, but simple Signore Blue John—coming from Rome—destination, Germany—profession, student—residence, America—and here’s my passport.” “America!” ejaculated he, falling back aghast, “Mylord an American—a millionaire! Dio mio! Santa Vergine! Jesu Maria! but Mylord is jesting; the Americans are black!” “Well you see I’m an exception, that’s all, so good night, and have me awakened in a couple of hours, at half-past two.” “Ah, I beg Mylord’s pardon, but I found the door unlocked when I entered; his Excellency had better not sleep with the door unbolted.” “Why not?” I asked, somewhat startled. “Oh, nothing—’tis only that—that—nothing—only it is better—safer.” My previous doubts and suspicions began at length to assume a definite form, and taking from my purse a *zwangiger*, “Now my good fellow,” said I, in a serious commanding tone, “what in heaven’s name do you mean?” He whipped the money into his pocket, twisted awkwardly from side to side, and cast a stealthy look around. “The fact is, Mylord, ’tis not safe, and besides, only two nights since, this very room was broken into, and—” “Well!” “And—the assassin—” “The what!” “The assassin robbed a traveller here, and—and—” “Murdered him!” “Yes, Mylord, and murdered him.” “Good God! in this room?” “Yes, sir, and in that very bed.” “Perhaps between those very sheets!” I exclaimed, springing forward and tearing off the covering; “look here! and here is blood, by all that’s sacred!” and seizing his arm, I dragged him towards the rug, all soiled with dirt, and marked here and there with blotches of a deep black dye; “is not this blood?” “I thought we’d washed the stains clean out,” he said, bending down to examine them more closely; “I expect ’tis ink Mylord.” The fellow was so calm, that I shamed me of my own excitement, and assuming as much as possible a tone of cool indifference, “how did the man get in?” I asked. “Come and see,” and putting down his light, he stalked towards the door; I walked a pace behind. “Mylord will perceive that little dark spot yonder in the corner of the yard beneath, distinguishable from the surrounding obscurity, by its deeper blackness; ’tis a low and narrow passage communication of the court with the street without. Through that passage the robber came; once inside the yard, he had but to mount the balcony on which we stand, a thing easily done, inasmuch as ’tis so little elevated from the ground. In fact the marks of bloody fingers were found next morning on the rail-

ings. Mylord's door gives on the piazza, and thence what followed, is of course easily understood."

"Do you know that fellow who accompanied me thither?" I abruptly asked, turning sharply on the man, and bending a piercing look upon him. He quailed beneath that searching gaze, stammered, then assuming an air of astonishment: "I thought he was Mylord's friend! he enquired particularly concerning the chamber, and asked if Mylord's baggage was brought up, or left down stairs, and—" "Where does he room?" "There in No. 11, next door to your Lordship." I mused a moment, the whole devilish plan flashed through my whirring brain, and without a word, I turned towards my room again; a creaking noise, as of a door slowly opening, startled me from my reverie, and looking instinctively towards No. 11, saw glaring on me, through the gaping crack, two sparkling eyes. They were withdrawn, and slowly and nearly imperceptibly the door closed to.

What were my sensations as I paced my floor, I need not, nor can I describe, nor was my anxiety lessened, when about to double lock and bolt the door, I found that a rickety latch alone held it shut, and from the square of unpainted, splintered wood, and the remnants of a screw upon the panel, I judged that both lock and bolt had been violently rended off. Softly placing a chair against the door, I once more seized upon the light, to make a more minute examination of the room. The tapestry appeared intact, the walls all solid, no marks of falling traps upon the floor or ceiling, the windows firmly shut, and even grated. So far all was well; divesting myself of my upper garments, I sat down a moment to ponder over my situation, to say the least as strange as it was novel, and pushing open the sash, sought the cool night air, that it might refresh my thoughts. The heavens seemed covered with a slight black veil, through which the bluer tints could by spots just be discerned, and a thousand thousand stars, interspersed with fiery planets, shone forth as sparkling jewels on a bridal dress; the moon too, now shot her mellow rays in broad sheaves of light, through openings in the silvered clouds, and now hid her pale face behind the denser masses, leaving all around in momentary darkness. The city slept; calm, peace, tranquility every where! Oh saugh! the idea of crime on such a lovely night as this! Worn out with long travel, and many sleepless nights, I cast my longing eyes towards the bed, then turned them to the heavens, then mused awhile, then laughed outright at my foolish fears, then—at seventeen one is somewhat reckless—threw off my clothes, and cast my wearied limbs upon the bed, resolved to rest, if not to sleep. Having no arms, I placed near at hand, in case of emergency, a stout umbrella, laid a heavy pair of English snuffers on the night table, thrust watch and purse beneath the pillow, turned over once or twice, dosed, awakened, and dosed again, the candle sputtered in its socket, the cathedral bell tolled one, a dozen other chimes re-

sponded, I started up, glared quick around, smiled, fell back, and slept. . . . Foolhardiness! . . . Some time I tossed about, assailed by agitating dreams, with thoughts all wandering deep entangled in strange labyrinths of ever-changing scenes of horror. Suddenly a rustling sound, so slight it hardly could be termed a noise, awakened me; at the very entrance of my chamber stood two figures in stealthy conference, men of dark sinister faces, whose fell purpose I did not doubt a moment. "Do it quietly and quickly," hissed one in a smothered whisper; "don't wake the house, we've no time to lose; I'll see to the other one, and then," leered he diabolically, "we'll carry off the packages;" so saying, the speaker gliding off on tip-toe, disappeared; the other desperado drawing from his bosom something which glittered like polished metal, surveyed it carefully, and muttering "all's right," softly pushed the door; it shook the chair behind, he stopped, drew back, placed noiselessly a dark lanthorn he held upon the piazza, stretched out his arm, laid hold of the obstacle to his entrance, gently lifted it up, put it aside, resumed his light, cast one look behind, and crept in, sliding barefooted towards the bed. I had seen and heard enough. I was really then entrapped in one of those dens of iniquity and crime, one of those city hells, the resort and nestling place of some horde of wretches. My time was come, and like our own wily Indian, I felt that stratagem was my only hope. Half-closing my eyes, I lay apparently wrapt in deep slumber, and yet the while with every nerve hard strung, and every faculty wide awake. The assassin eagerly bending forward, was now within a few steps of where I lay. Down with him, and sending forth a yell, I bounded to my feet, grasped with iron hand the heavy umbrella, and dashed it at the miscreant's head; he eluded it, and glancing down his arm, it struck the lamp, and both fell shivered to the earth. An oath loud and horrible burst from the villain's lips as the shock sent him reeling back against the wall. I followed quick, and rushing on the astonished bravo, aimed a deadly thrust with the huge snuffers' point, full at his heart. The stroke was parried, and closing in, we grappled now for life or death; suddenly he raised his arm to strike, something clenched within his fist, gleamed in the pale moon beams, he poised it for a moment, then struck with mighty strength; I turned it off, and the weapon fell clinking on the floor. Closer then I hugged him to my breast, until his writhing body cracked, and gave beneath my pressure, and I could hear him grind his teeth, and choking, mutter oaths of fury and revenge. Suddenly he freed his arm which I held locked, and though I struggled with all the agony and fierceness of despair to keep him off, I felt his brawny fingers groping on my shoulders, and clutching at the neck. I strove to whirl him off, dashing random strokes about me in the dark, yet all in vain, I could not throw him prostrate, nor tear myself from his murderous vice-like grasp. Closer and closer he pressed me to him, until our cheeks

lay side by side, and I could feel his hot spasmodic breath upon my shoulder. I tried to cry for help, or shriek, but his fingers now were twined about my throat, and my rattling voice died away in husky, hissing gasps. One last despairing effort, and madly wrenching from within his gripe my hand, I dealt him with lightning speed and force, a fierce blow at the brain. The heavy pointed instrument crashed through the bones, and my antagonist staggering backwards, reeled, and fell headlong on the floor with a hideous yell, echoed and reëchoed over and again throughout the house, as if by a hundred howling devils. Loud halloes fierce and impatient, cries of horror and dismay, respond in wild discord from every quarter, the confused din of a rushing crowd resound in every corridor, the door flies in splinters, and the way is choked with half-naked figures, bearing arms and lights; the whole gang now rush upon me, despair lends me energy, and springing from the breast of their prostrate accomplice, I bound towards the bed, wielding high in air, with frantic energy the fragments of a chair; "Come on ye hell-hounds! dastard crew! and damn the first who dares advance but a single step!"

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"And so 'tis already half-past two, and you only came to wake me, for the Como train, hey?" I asked, addressing my late antagonist, the hotel shoe-black, a miserable looking object, who stood for all the world like a weather-beaten scare-crow, torn, trembling, pale, and with a broad pair of English snuffers dangling in his cheek. "Yes, Mylord, and my fellow shoe-black was to have awakened your companion." "Quietly and quickly, and not to disturb the house too, eh? ha, ha, ha! well you've succeeded marvellously! but 'tis somewhat late, and time that we were off, and so, my poor fellow, what shall I give you to remember me by." The shoe-black grinned until the snuffers wagged against his cheek, then holding out two large molar teeth, the fragments of a dark lantern, and a broken watch; "let Mylord fix a price himself," whined he. "So ho! 'twas your infernal wrath that gleamed so traitorously in the moon-light, eh! ha, ha!" And the host, and servant, and travellers laughed and roared, and pulled down their shirt-tails from very glee. "There will that suit?" and I rang three gold Napoleons on the table, "'twill mend your jaw, your lantern, and your watch cristal, and hold, I'll throw in to boot my umbrella and my tattered gown, perhaps the last may help to patch up your cheek when you've got the snuffers out." "Thanks Mylord, but you have forgotten—" "What?" "My fee for waking you up—ten cents, Mylord." "Here are twenty." "Your noble Lordship's Excellency's most humble obedient servant, thanks Mylord."